Arab Spring
It was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2000s. It began in Tunisia in response to corruption and economic stagnation.

From Tunisia, the protests initially spread to five other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain.

The rulers (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in 2011, and Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen in 2012) were ousted, and major uprisings and social violence occurred, including riots, civil wars, or rebellions.
Continuous street demonstrations erupted in Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Sudan.

Small protests also erupted in Djibouti, Mauritania, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Western Sahara.

Among the main slogans of protesters across the Arab world:

"The people want to bring down the regime!"



Clockwise from the top left corner:

Protesters gather in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, February 9, 2011;

Habib Bourguiba Avenue, protesters in Tunis, Tunisia, January 14, 2011;

Oppositionists in Sana'a, Yemen, calling for President Ali Abdullah Saleh's resignation on February 3, 2011;

Hundreds of thousands of people rally in Baniyas, Syria, April 29, 2011

The initial wave of revolutions and protests faded by mid-to-late 2012, with many Arab Spring demonstrations met with violent responses from the authorities, pro-government

militias, counter-protesters, and the military. Protesters responded to these attacks with violence in some cases.

This was followed by multiple large-scale conflicts:

The Syrian Civil War; the rise of ISIS, the Iraqi insurgency and subsequent civil war; the Egyptian crisis, the election and removal of Mohamed Morsi from office, and the subsequent unrest and rebellion; the Libyan crisis; and the Yemeni crisis and subsequent civil war.
The power struggle continued after the immediate response to the Arab Spring. As leadership changed and regimes were reshuffled, power vacuums opened up across the Arab world.

Ultimately, this led to a simmering battle between the consolidation of power by religious elites and the growing support for democracy in many Muslim-majority countries.

Early hopes that these popular movements would eradicate corruption, increase political participation, and achieve greater economic justice were quickly shattered by counterrevolutionary actions by foreign actors in Yemen, regional and international military interventions in Bahrain and Yemen, and devastating civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.
Some have referred to the subsequent and ongoing conflicts as the Arab Winter.

A new wave of protests began in 2018, leading to the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in 2018 and Saad Hariri in Lebanon in 2020, and the ouster of Presidents Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria in 2019.

These events, sometimes called a second Arab Spring, demonstrated that the conditions that began the Arab Spring have not faded and that political movements against tyranny and exploitation continue.
As of 2025, multiple conflicts are still ongoing that may be viewed as having originated in the Arab Spring. A major shift in the Syrian Civil War occurred in December 2024 when a rebel offensive led to the fall of the Assad regime, after more than a decade of war. In Libya, a major civil war ended, with the intervention of foreign powers. In Yemen, the civil war continues to affect the country.

Some scholars and observers object to the label "Arab Spring," claiming that the term is problematic for several reasons. First, it was coined by Western commentators, not those involved in the events.
Perhaps the first specific use of the term Arab Spring to refer to these events began with the American political magazine Foreign Policy.

Political scientist Marc Lynch described the Arab Spring as "a term I probably inadvertently coined" in a January 6, 2011, article for Foreign Policy.

However, the protesters participating in the events described their political actions as an "uprising," an "Arab awakening," and an "Arab renaissance," using terms such as dignity and revolution.

Some authors claim that Western governments, scholars, and the media used the term to diminish the goals and rhetoric of the revolutionary people.
Joseph Massad said on Al Jazeera that the term was "part of an American strategy to control the movement's objectives" and steer it toward Western-style liberal democracy.

When the Arab Spring protests in some countries were followed by electoral successes for Islamist parties, some American experts coined the terms "Islamic Spring" and "Islamic Winter."

The term "Spring" highlights the problem of projecting Western expectations onto non-Western actors and practices.
This term follows the Western model of the 1848 revolutions, known as the "Springtime of Nations," and the 1968 Prague Spring, in which Czech student Jan Palach set himself on fire, much like Mohamed Bouazizi.

In the wake of the Iraq War, it was used by many commentators and bloggers who anticipated a major Arab movement toward democracy.

The term "Arab Spring" is therefore highly controversial, as it suggests the expectation that events will emulate the Western model of democratic revolutions.
Causes:

Internal Pressures

The world watched the Arab Spring unfold, "moved by the narrative of a young generation peacefully rising up against repressive autocracy to secure a more democratic political system and a brighter economic future."

The Arab Spring is widely believed to have been sparked by discontent, particularly among youth and unions, with local government rule, although some have speculated that wide income gaps and pressures stemming from the Great Recession may have also played a role.

Some activists participated in programs sponsored by the US-funded National Endowment for Democracy, but the US government has claimed that it did not initiate the uprisings.
Many factors led to the protests, including issues such as reform, human rights violations, political corruption, economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, and several structural demographic factors, such as the large proportion of educated but dissatisfied youth who lacked adequate employment opportunities.

The catalysts for the uprisings across North Africa and the Gulf included the concentration of wealth in the hands of monarchs in power for decades, the lack of transparency in its redistribution, corruption, and, particularly, the refusal of young people to accept the status quo.

Some protesters viewed the Turkish model as ideal (contested but peaceful elections, a rapidly growing but liberal economy, a secular constitution but an Islamist government).

Other analysts blamed the rising food prices on commodity traders.

However, others argued that the context of high unemployment rates and corrupt political systems led to opposition movements within the region.

Social Media:

In the wake of the Arab Spring protests, much attention focused on the role of social media and digital technologies in enabling citizens in the regions affected by the "Arab uprisings" to engage in collective activism bypassing state-run media channels. However, the impact of social media on political activism during the Arab Spring has been much debated.

Protests erupted in both countries with very high internet penetration (such as Bahrain, where 88% of the population was online in 2011) and in countries with the lowest internet penetration rates (Yemen and Libya).

Use of social media platforms doubled in Arab countries during the protests, with the exception of Libya.
Source: Wikipedia.org